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Humans Helping Humans

This essay is not targeted to determine what happens to us when we die. It is not written to debate whether there is or isn't an afterlife. Is not even intended to disprove or bash any religious mindsets. However, it cannot be argued that the purpose, so to speak, of religion is to provide answers to the timeless question of, "what happens when I die"? Most, if not all, religions provide a set of morals and guidelines to guarantee us either a place in heaven or a second chance at life, but in a higher position. The question being proposed is whether or not human beings are capable of being moral without religious background or the idea that there is a divine force that will grant us eternal life or doom us to eternal suffering based on our actions here on Earth.

There are billions of people throughout the world who have outwardly expressed being nonreligious. According to the American Religious Identification Survey, the number of people who had selected "none" for religion in New York City had risen to 15% in 2008 from 8% in 1990. With its approximate population being over 8.3 million, there were more than a million "nonbelievers" (Lee). It's clear that the nonreligious are rising and becoming more common, but why? With the rapid advancements in science and technology, along with countless philosophical theories, the idea that there probably isn't a God has become more and more "logical". With this sort of mindset trending, should we fear that our society would collapse? We as Americans are founded on Christian morals, which molds our society today, so it would make sense to quick jump to the conclusion "yes". They would argue that we'd revert to primitive self-indulgence and merely fend for ourselves. I, and many others, would argue that we as humans are born with innate moral values and social contracts.

Now that I stated that I believe that I don't believe in God, I'd like to reiterate that this essay continues to maintain an unbiased and also accepting view of religion. Religion itself is actually very important. Allow me to explain through this quote. "The work that we need to do, we atheists, humanists and non-believers, is to build a better world and not try to tear down those with whom we disagree. When our goal is erasing religion, rather

than embracing human beings, we all lose," said Greg M. Epstein, the Humanist chaplain at Harvard University. The idea? Humanism.

Morality is not dependent on an all-powerful deity. Nonbelievers as well can follow meaningful, and even purposeful, lives. So what is it that makes us good if it is not God? We cannot solely pin wars and other historical acts of violence on religion. Both the religious and nonreligious have had their fair share. We as humans, religious and nonreligious, are capable of building hospitals, organizing charities, or even something as simple as giving a total stranger a nickel because they brought slightly too little of cash for their order. We do not do these things because we fear Hell and it's clearly not because we're selfish, disbelievers. Sometimes, it's because, unlike other animals, we have reputation. We don't think about what God will do if we pass by someone in need of help, we think about how others will view us. It's because, unlike other animals, people will gossip. We want to be seen as someone who is good. Sometimes, it's because we realize what we have in our lives and want to share that with others. Sometimes, we take what we have for granted and want others to make something more with their lives. "A bear can help another bear find food, but it can't gossip about how a third bear, a year or two ago, tried to swindle him out of a pot of honey" (Epstein). We are more successful and happier if we cooperate.

There are those who don't really believe in God, but say they believe because they enjoy the community that religion offers. This is the most respectable feature of religion that we would like to emulate in Humanism. We Humanists want to provide a community where you don't have to believe in God in order to have moral courage, compassion, and purpose, but also embrace those who do believe in a higher being or divine force.

The old atheists said there was no God. The so-called "New Atheists" said there was no God, and they were vocally vicious about it. Now, the new "New Atheists" — call it Atheism 3.0 — say there's still no God, but maybe religion isn't all that bad. Faith provides meaning and purpose for millions of believers, inspires people to tend to each other and build communities, gives them a sense of union with a transcendent force, and provides numerous health benefits. Moreover, the galvanizing force behind many achievements in Western civilization has been faith (Burke).

These are all attributes that have a positive effect on human beings, which we should all deserve to have, regardless of our religious beliefs.

Remember, this essay is not to bash the religious. I do not wish to impose my nonreligious beliefs, however I feel it is necessary to speak from that point of view due to my concern that there are many who label themselves as "religious" merely out of fear of committing to the title of "nonreligious". I think many nonreligious people would agree to the saying that, "There's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life". That is, at least, what a British ad campaign had to say. A refreshing change of pace as the British Humanist Association sends out two sets of 30 buses, and more, with posters inside and out of various nonreligious posters. I know it may seem that I'm hypocrite for saying, "I do not wish to impose my nonreligious beliefs" as I go on to say "a refreshing change of pace" in context towards the posters, but let's be honest; how often do we see and commonly accept any kind of advertisement for religion? How often do we see posters or signs asking us to give our soul up to Jesus for salvation or else receive eternal damnation? This sort of mindset of accustomed advertisement is almost a sort of brainwashing. How are people supposed to be encouraged to ask the deepest question in life and find their purpose if they're grown up to believe that it's just normal to accept what a book or other people say? Shouldn't there be more options? Shouldn't there be a balance between the two groups? Professor Dawkins put it as such:

Religion is accustomed to getting a free ride – automatic tax breaks, unearned respect and the right to not be offended, the right to brainwash children. Even on the buses, nobody thinks twice when they see a religious slogan plastered across the side. This campaign to put alternative slogans on London buses will make people think – and thinking is anathema to religion (BBC News).

So again, I wish that those who are religious do not feel threatened, but please, take into consideration the nonreligious amongst you. We do not ask you to convert away from God, or judge you based on your beliefs. So please, do not determine the kind of people we are just because we don't see eye to eye. I ask of this to the nonreligious people as well. They are just as many arrogant individuals who do in fact, try to shut down the religious and argue that they are wrong and no one should believe in God. This is no

better. Being stubbornly certain that there is no God is equivalent to being stubbornly certain that there is one. No progress is being made there. So please, let's learn to put these things behind us and move on to finding a way to make the one life we know for sure we have better. Let's make it better for ourselves, and for everyone else. Let's live in world of humans who help out other humans, instead of a world of nonreligious and religious who patronize one another. We are all just human.

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